

OUACHITA VS. KIAMICHI

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THE OKLAHOMA geologists seem to be fighting a losing battle in the matter of trying to popularize the name Ouachita, which name has been applied to a group of mountains located in southeastern Oklahoma. For this group the name Kiamichi is commonly used, while, in fact, the Kiamichi Mountains are but one range of the Ouachitas.

The Ouachita Mountains, as the geologists understand it, consist of an oval-shaped mountain mass, about two hundred miles long and sixty miles wide, located in southeastern Oklahoma and southwestern Arkansas. It extends from Atoka, Oklahoma, on the west, to Little Rock, Arkansas, on the east. At the latter place, Big Rock, a few miles northwest of the city, on which is located Fort Logan H. Roots, and Little Rock, near the State Capitol in the east part of the city, constitute the eastern limit of the mountains. At Atoka the exposure of Talihina chert standing on edge a mile east of the city, just across Boggy Creek, forms the western end of the Ouachita Mountains.

These mountains as a whole consist of a number of long parallel barrier ranges, running in a general east-west direction, separated by valleys. The mountains are made up chiefly of ledges of sandstone, known as Jackfork series 5,000 feet thick, standing on edge. The valleys consist of a softer formation known as the Stanley shale. These long barrier ranges of Jackfork sandstone have received various names. In Oklahoma some of these names are Winding Stair, Kiamichi, Jackfork, Rich, and Buffalo. Many of the ranges are unnamed.

The popular name for these mountains throughout most of Oklahoma is the Kiamichi Mountains, while in fact the name Kiamichi should be applied strictly to one and only one of these ranges. The Kiamichi range enters Oklahoma from Arkansas in Townships 1 and 2 N., and extends almost due west for about fifty miles, then bears off to the southwest and passes under the Cretaceous overlap a few miles north of Antlers. As exposed in Oklahoma, the range is about 75 miles in length, and throughout its entire distance, stands as a barrier 1,000 to 1,200 feet high above the valley of the Kiamichi River to the North. The name Kiamichi, according to Peter Hudson of Tuskahoma, who is perhaps our best authority on matters of this kind, means, "The place where they took my whiskey." His explanation of the origin of the name is as follows:

In the early days the chiefs of the Choctaw Indians were very zealous to prevent whiskey being brought into the nation. The only place where it could be obtained was across Red River in Texas, and the young men of the tribe who were desirous of obtaining fire water would ride down a well known trail which lead along the river, now known as Kiamichi, to its mouth, would cross by ferry, or by fording the river, and obtain their whiskey in Texas. On returning home they were often met by the Light Horsemen, or Choctaw police, who confiscated the whiskey and executed judgment by the lash. All this happened near the mouth of the river. So that the young Choctaws spoke of the place as Kiamichi, "The place where they took my whis-

key. The name was afterward applied to the river, and later to the mountain which flanked the river on the south.

Now as to the name Ouachita. When the early French explorers ascended the Mississippi River and its tributaries, crossed what is now Louisiana and southern Arkansas, they found a tribe of Indians whose name was pronounced Wash-e-taw. To this name they gave the French spelling, Ouachita. This river, which rises near Mena, Arkansas, flows east past Hot Springs, and south into Louisiana. There is a Ouachita County, Arkansas, and Ouachita Parish, Louisiana, and both states have towns named Ouachita.

The Frenchman on exploring farther up Red River passed several small streams entering this river from the north, and finally came to a larger stream which they named Faux Ouachita, or False Ouachita. This spelling is found on a number of the earlier maps, but later the Faux was dropped and the spelling anglicized so that this name is now spelled Washita, and there is in Oklahoma, as you know, a Washita County and town and several townships spelled Washita.

Dr. C. W. Honess in his very excellent paper, the Geology of the Southern Ouachita Mountains of Oklahoma, has given an historical resume of the name Ouachita and its use. According to Honess¹, this range of mountains was called Masserne by Darby in 1818, and Massern by Nuttall in 1819. Branner in 1888 first used the term Ouachita Mountain system to apply to this range of mountains. Later, Robert T. Hill used the phrase, "Ouachita system of Arkansas and Indian Territory" to include the Massern ranges (our present Ouachitas), the Arbuckle Hills, and the Wichita Mountains. Taft in his series of coal papers describing the geology of Indian Territory used the Ouachitas as essentially the equivalent of the Massern ranges. Purdue and later writers, have, in general, followed Taft.

Honess, at the time of the preparation of the paper I mentioned above, attempted to change the name to the earlier term, Massern. This was because he very properly realized that the names Washita and Ouachita, being pronounced nearly alike, are continually being confused one with the other, and both with the name Wichita. Honess, so he says, sent out a letter to some twenty or thirty prominent geologists regarding using the name Massern range rather than Ouachita. The replies were about equally divided and Honess states that, "The writer is unmoved in his own opinion that the name should be changed back to Massern Ranges or Massern Mountains, but for lack of a substantial majority favoring this view, he has followed the current usage in the present report."²

And so the matter stands today. The man on the street uses the word Kiamichi if he uses it at all. He has a very hazy idea about the Kiamichi Mountains and the Kiamichi country, but he cannot be taught the name Ouachita. The geologists use the name Ouachita, and will probably so continue to use it regardless of the fact that the name conveys no intelligence to the layman.

I am told that in the State of Arkansas the people in general refer to these mountains as the Ozarks and speak of the mountains in the northern part of the state, which really form a part of the Ozark system, as the

¹Honess, C. W., Geology of the Southern Ouachita Mountains of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Geol. Surv. Bull. 32, 1923, pp. 29 et seq.

²Honess, C. W., op. cit. p. 31.

Boston Mountains, and that the word Kiamichi Mountains is not known in Arkansas. So that perhaps we in Oklahoma are no worse off than the Arkansawyers. The rank and file of the people in Arkansas will probably continue calling these mountains the Ozarks, the people in Oklahoma will call them the Kiamichi, while we geologists, conscious of our own rectitude, will continue to be high brow and call them Ouachitas.